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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the educational systems of Bulgaria and Romania, as compared to the educational environment in an English as a Second Language (ESL) department at Delgado Community College (Louisiana). The document interweaves vignettes of personal experiences gained while in those two countries with those as an instructor in the United States. The goal was to incorporate the seminar abroad experience into the ESL classroom where multiple cultures are represented. A course syllabus is included to show how these learning experiences were interwoven into the community classroom setting. (EH)

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THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF SCHOOLS IN BULGARIA, ROMANIA, AND DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Yadira M. Diaz
Recipient of the Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program
Summer 1996

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November 15, 1996

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"Perspectives on Students"
(from Bulgaria and Romania)

Students' friendly voices.
Speaking face to face.
Inquiries about courses.
To understand with haste.

Students' numerous bounces.
Moving at quick pace.
Tests bring noises.
To end the educational race.

INTRODUCTION.

Talking to Maria, Olev and Elena, bright, young adults, all former and current students in the prestigious U.S. universities of Dartmouth and Harvard, I observed the priority for Bulgarians of getting a good education. Likewise, in Romania, I met four students, who were already studying abroad or were soon going to, at George Cosbuc English-Bilingual High School. With their wide eyes and inebriated feelings of excitement, these students expressed the importance and privilege of getting a top high school education.

Intuitively, I felt that education is indeed a major goal for most students in Bulgaria and Romania. Indeed, in my studies there via lectures, field trips, literature, and interviews, I found this to be true. Through education, students can be somebody, with hopes of working towards the advancement of their countries, earning a decent salary, or receiving a scholarship to study abroad.

Like students in Bulgaria and Romania, education is a vital part of the students in the Department of English as a Second Language (ESL) at Delgado Community College where I teach. The students come from several geographical areas: Central America, Japan, Vietnam, Palestine, Cuba, Korea, Turkey, and Eastern Europe. Because many of them pay for their studies by working part-time or full-time, these students are motivated to receive an education for academic, professional or survival purposes. Obviously, education is at the top of their list.

Similarly, parents take great pride in the education of their teenage sons or daughters. For example, one early morning in Sofia, as four colleagues and I took our daily walk, we saw a group of people standing outside in what appeared to be a government building. We approached the people in hopes of finding out the nature of the gathering. I took the lead and inquired in very broken Bulgarian why the crowd stood outside the building. A very conservative looking gentleman responded in broken English, "Test to go study English." Communicating further by gestures and one-syllable words, we discovered that the crowd was made up of parents supporting their young teen children who were taking "the test" to continue studying at a foreign language school. Apparently, entry to foreign language schools is extremely competitive. In the same way, I spoke to several Romanian parents who stated assertively, "Education is the only thing left in life."

Of course, at a higher education institution like Delgado Community College, parents do not directly intervene in the education of their adult son or daughter. However, we do still find that in the homes of culturally diversed families, parents frequently continue to instill the value of an education to their college sons or daughters, especially in Vietnamese, Latin American and Middle Eastern families. Thus, for example, Vietnamese college students attend classes in the ESL Department full-time, yet work part-time or full-time; yet they persevere with great struggles.

BACKGROUND.

As you have previously read, I have shared some scenes of students, parents and institutions which I was extremely lucky to experience first-hand during my three-week stay in each country, Bulgaria first and Romania second. In each country, I was fortunate to learn from knowledgeable lecturers about the educational systems, to visit high schools and universities and to talk to instructors and some students. In many instances, I shared methodologies, listened to academic needs and concerns, and received excellent examples of publications and literature. Students mainly contrasted educational systems and candidly discussed advantages and disadvantages in their educational systems. Consequently, I returned to the United States with a greater increase of knowledge about Bulgaria and Romania's educational systems before and after the transition of 1989.

BULGARIA.

In Bulgaria, the Fulbright staff excellently coordinated lecturers and visits. Professor Boris Galabov lectured on The Bulgarian Educational System with a brief historical perspective on educational transitions. A presentation by Professors George Chobanov and Julietta Savova focused on reforms in Bulgarian education. Likewise, field trips in Sofia and cities throughout the country allowed me to learn about ESL, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) /English programs, meet faculty and browse through school textbooks and supplies at several institutions such as the University of Sofia, University of Plovdiv, New Bulgarian University, American College of Sofia, American University, University of Veliko Turnovo, English Language High School (Varna), University of Economics, Varna Institute for Teacher Training, Burgas Free University, and English Language High School (Burgas). Fortunately, my most rewarding moments happened during my formal and informal conversations with faculty, staff and students at educational institutions which I visited.

In his lecture on The Bulgarian Educational System, Professor Galabov began describing education from the Ottoman Empire up to the Soviet influence. To the Soviets, the philosophy of education was based on, "One can advance in life by being a specialist for the Party but not necessarily receiving high-quality education. Thus, the government, faculty and students did not seem interested in high-quality education. The turning point was in 1989, where changes began to develop and be implemented. Material from his lecture and that of Professors Chobanov and Savova indicated some transitions occurred:

- Graduates of high schools and technical high schools began to enter universities
- Universities are introducing specialized programs;
- New departments have been opened in efforts to have academic freedom;
- A balance is being attempted among society's interest, level of education and academic freedom;
- Efforts to make education flexible are in effect;
- An effort in internal higher education is taking place as needs in European unity arise;

- A very competitive exam to enter foreign language high schools takes place yearly. On the first day, students are tested in Bulgarian language and literature. On the second day, students take the math test. In case of not passing, the student attends a non-specialized high school.
- The student may complete degrees for bachelor, master and Ph.D.
- The school curriculum includes (a) kindergarten (non-compulsory), (b) primary schools (8 years compulsory) , (c) four years in lower secondary schools, (d) five years in foreign language schools, (e) comprehensive schools, and (f) vocational schools.
- High school curriculum emphasizes foreign languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Portuguese.

I had the pleasure to meet and interview Mrs. Emilia Popova, an instructor at one of the most popular foreign language high schools in Sofia, a person with a great level of information, and a person willing to help all Fulbrighters in the group. She emphasized the uniqueness of these schools. In addition, parents want their sons and daughters to attend foreign language high schools because when these students graduate, their quality of education is extremely high. Thus, they can compete for private scholarships to study in the United States at Ivy League universities, such as Darmouth, Stanford, Princeton or Harvard. Mrs. Popova explained that before eight grade, students are taught in Bulgarian. From the eight grade level to tenth grade, English is taught intensively with the integration of skills and up-to-date activities: group discussions, dictations, pronunciation, games, and role-plays.

ROMANIA.

Like in Bulgaria, the Fulbright staff did a magnificent job in organizing field trips and lectures in Bucharest and in special sites all over the country. The staff coordinated visits to a vast number of academic institutions, where I received the most satisfactory learning. These institutions included: University of Bucharest, George Cosbuc English-Bilingual School, Black Sea University, and Lucian Blaga University. In Lucian Blaga University, the knowledge and the dynamism of the lecturers instilled in me a thirst for more in the areas of Romanian music, literature, history, language, politics, architecture, and the folk traditions of Sibiu. At Lucian Blaga, several persons stood out: Professor Rodica Petica-Roman's emotional statements of welcome and departure, and her warmth and genuine affection, Professor Dorin Drambarean's enthusiastic lessons about the Romanian language classes, and Professor Cornel Lungu's presentation on Romanian fine arts at the Brukenthal Museum and his charming hospitality. Like the lecturers in Sibiu, the three presenters on Romanian education system and its reform and Dr. Christian Popa on Romanian economics, all in Bucharest, demonstrated concern for their audience to have a clear understanding.

Since my interest was primarily in education, the visit to George Cosbuc English- Bilingual High School was of major importance. In a large roundtable discussion facilitated by Professor Miruna Carjanopol, the school's principal, several faculty members and four students from George Cosbuc shared information with the Fulbrighters. In the discussion, I learned the following:

- Bilingual schools offer high-quality education.
- George Cosbuc High School has officially been named as the classic bilingual school.
- English is the foreign language which students most take.
- Other languages which are offered include French, Russian, German, and Latin.
- The school newspaper is entirely written in English.
- Twenty-two faculty members teach English; six of them come from the United Kingdom and the United States.

- The majority of students continue their studies in higher education institutions.
- The curriculum includes four classes per week in English from grades 5 to 8, and five to seven classes per week in English from grades 9 to 12.
- Classes such as History of the U.S., Geography of the U.S., and American Studies are taught in English.

It was evident, from my conversations with Bulgarian and Romanian faculty members and students, in addition to information from lecturers and the visits to high schools and universities, that the commonality with students from Delgado Community College was to obtain an effective education in English, whether it was in a foreign language, bilingual or ESL curriculum. Therefore, using this as a point of departure, I was challenged to create and facilitate an activity in a class where diversed cultures interacted and learned from one another.

OBJECTIVE.

In late April, 1996, I received notice of my award to attend the Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program and study "Bulgaria: Realities and Myths in Transformation" and "The Role Played by Education in the Social, Cultural and Political Changes in Romania." One of the major objectives I had in mind was to incorporate the seminar experience in my ESL classroom where I have a multiplicity of cultures willing to learn from each other, where there is a genuine interest in education, and where there is an atmosphere of respect and friendship. Specifically, I wanted to create an activity which led to cross-cultural awareness of educational systems, in special about Delgado Community College, Bulgaria and Romania, with the advanced level conversation students.

According to the syllabus' objectives, at the end of the course, the advanced conversation student should be able to (1) speak understandably, (2) communicate thoughts, ideas, and information coherently, (3) be familiar with the Delgado curriculum, and (4) take notes effectively. In conducting the activity, students were not only expected to demonstrate satisfactory proficiency in the course objectives, but also show an acceptable degree of mastery in the skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking. Consequently, I was responsible for the students achieving these objectives.

STRATEGIES.

Because I frequently use the whole-language approach in my class, I act as the facilitator and my students act independently while performing a class activity. At the beginning, because of different educational systems, foreign students, especially those that come from very traditional countries, have difficulty accepting that they have a voice in the class. Slowly, however, they begin to change as we discuss the rationale behind whole language, its advantages and disadvantages, and I model the task which we are to begin. Fortunately, the few students from Eastern Europe act assertively, similar to the behavior of Maria, Elena, and Olev in Bulgaria and students I talked to in Romania. Most of them welcome the approach. By the end of the semester, though, the majority of students act rather independently without even knowing it.

Because the course goal in the advanced conversation class is to allow the students to participate actively, appropriately, and confidently in a variety of conversational settings, I create projects which are conducted in a community setting. Since many of the students are taking or will take major level classes related to their careers, they need to become familiar with the Delgado curriculum (which is also one of the objectives.), hence the rationale of the class activity students engaged in.

MATERIALS.

In following the goal and objectives stated in the course syllabus, one of the themes students learned this semester was education. With a diversed student population, 20 students from Vietnam, Slovakia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Japan, Iran, the Dominican Republic, Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua and Guatemala, cross cultural awareness about educational systems was accessible, especially as it related to Bulgaria, Romania, and Delgado Community College. Students actively performed the following:

1. Researched the Delgado catalog to learn about admission procedures, faculty members, Delgado's history, probation and suspension, academic divisions, academic programs/degree programs, and rules applicable to international students. (See Handout A.)

2. Met guest speakers, Mrs. Janice Bolden, Director of Admissions, and Mr. Jim Wolff, Counselor for International Students. Mrs. Bolden explained the admission process; Mr. Wolff spoke on immigration rules for foreign students. Students listened carefully, took notes, and asked questions.

3. Brainstormed about areas of education and wrote a list which included lectures, class and group discussions, traditional and liberal education, informal and formal styles of teaching, classroom atmosphere and facilities, class policies on absences and punctuality, and methods of testing, grading, and kind of clothing. (See Handout B.)

4. Selected a major degree program to study once they finished ESL. Next, students chose a faculty member teaching in that program, and a class to visit and observe. The class was also taught by the same faculty member.

5. Chose areas of interest from the brainstorm list to formulate questions for the class visits/observations. For example, in groups, students wrote five questions (which I checked for grammar correctness) to ask the faculty members during the interview. In addition, students designed a form to use while conducting class visits/observations. (See Handouts C and D.)

6. Informed faculty members of the nature of the project by giving them a letter. (See Handout E.) Students then scheduled appointments with faculty members for both the interview and class visits/observations. Frequently, since appointments were set up according to the faculty member's schedule, students took at least 15 minutes in the interview. They wrote notes or tape recorded. If possible, students returned to class after their interviews.

Because class visits/observations took an hour, several of them occurred during the regular conversation class time. Occasionally, some interviews and class visits/observations were conducted at other time periods, at the convenience of both student and faculty member. (See Handout C.)

7. Conducted interviews in the faculty member's office first. Two or three days later, according to the faculty member's instructions, students visited and observed the class very carefully. They used the form they had previously designed to take notes about the class. (See Handout D.).

8. Contrasted educational systems from their highest level in high school or university in their native countries and the class observed. (See Handout F.)

It was at this point that the majority of the students verbalized their high school experiences, most importantly those students from Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, thus contributing to cross-cultural awareness. Since there were no Romanian students in the class, I filled in the gap by telling the conversation students my observations while in Bucharest and other cities. The Bulgarian, Central European, and other students expressed their educational experience to include memorization, teacher-centered, larger number of subjects to take, little analysis, and small student participation. In contrast to their experience, the students, based on their class visit, the informal atmosphere of the class, the friendly instructor, class activities such as group work, class discussion (questions-answers), and student input on themes, activities, and test and project deadlines. As part of his class observation, the student from Slovakia advised that several students lacked respect for the instructor by talking and coming in late to class, thus interrupting. The Bulgarian student recommended an effective learning tool for consideration: a combination of memorization and analytical skills because she though that there was a benefit in doing both.

To finalize this project, I gave students their instructions on the written composition and oral presentation. Students wrote in class; I acted as the facilitator. Second, I bought poster boards for students to be original and showcase their compositions, photos and any other relevant information. Finally, I invited several faculty members who participated in this project, Delgado staff, and friends to watch student's oral presentations when they explained their poster display. (See Handout G.)

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Because of my experience, the following recommendations serve as tools of assistance.

- Take legible notes on lectures related to your particular topic.
- Ask questions during lectures and field trips; participate.
- Ask questions for clarification.
- Take advantage of lecturers which specialize on your topic by collecting handouts, interviewing, and obtaining their publications.
- Exchange conversations with as many people as you can during field trips.
- Get business cards or write addresses and telephone numbers of resourceful people.
- Read your notes as frequently as you can.
- Share notes with colleagues.
- Try to write a daily journal, which can offer a wealth of personal memories.

EVALUATION.

As the project ended and I reflected on it, I discovered that some points needed attention. As self-evaluation, I asked the students for their opinion about the project. Most of them responded affirmatively because (1) the project had helped decide what field of study to enter, and (2) they would either take the class or not, depending on their experience. Although the majority of students found the classes they attended to be enthusiastic, there were two groups that did not. Of course, it will always be true that some classes will be productive; others will not. In addition, students were formulating an opinion based on one class visit. To improve in the future, I will schedule two class visits, organize sub-activities more carefully, and schedule the project earlier in the semester.

HANDOUT A

EDUCATION AT DELGADO

INFORMATION FROM THE CATALOG. Read the information in the catalog carefully and answer the following questions:

1. What are the admission requirements for regular students at Delgado?

2. What are the admission requirements for international students at Delgado?

3. Read the information on the program on p. 138.

   a. What is the name of the program?

   b. What degree will the student receive?

   c. What division does this program belong to?

   d. What are the requirements for students to enter the program?

   e. What are two required courses in the major field of study? How many credits for each?

   f. What are two general education requirements? How many credits?

   g. What are two required related courses and their credits?

QUIZ

DELGADO'S CATALOG

INSTRUCTIONS: *Find the following information in the catalog.*

1. *pp. 15-17 - How many academic divisions are there and what are they?*

2. *Name two academic programs in each division.*

3. *p. 169 - Define when a student gets on PROBATION.*

4. *Define when a student gets on SUSPENSION.*

5. *p. 96-97 - What are two courses under Humanities, two courses under Social Sciences and two courses under Natural Sciences which a student might take?*

6. *Be able to answer questions about any academic program in the catalog,*

7. *What is the difference between admissions for a normal student and an international student?*

HANDOUT B

Education

Brainstorming:

Tests
Grades
Teachers
Students
Discipline
Student Activities
Facilities
Grammar Lab
Composition Lab
Computer Lab
Library
Bookstore
Campus Security
Problem Solving
Discussion
Bilingual Education
Compulsory Education
Clothing
Teaching Style
Methods of Education
Classrooms
School year
Vacations
Holidays
Courses (Required/Elective)
Formal
Informal
Mixed classes
Uniforms
Curriculum

Any other ideas for Education???

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Now write the brainstorming ideas in categories. Work with your group.

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HANDOUT C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EDUCATION PROJECT

FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.

A. Interview with the instructor must take place this week (10-24, 10-25) or Monday, 10-28, of next week only. Remember not to take too long with the instructor. When you finish with the interview, return to class immediately.

When is your interview? _____

B. Class observation must take place all next week, 10-28 to 11/1. If you need to go during the conversation class, you can. You will stay in the class the full time.

What class will you observe? Write the complete information.

_____

Where is it? _____What time?_____ What day?_____

C. Interview with the instructor:

1. Your name, your major field of study
2. Instructor's full name, division
3. Office number, office telephone number
4. When is the appointment with the instructor?

_____

5. Write five questions you will ask the instructor? Be careful with grammar.
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
6. If you're doing the interview in a group, EACH ONE WILL ASK QUESTIONS. DO NOT WRITE THE SAME RESPONSE. IF YOU DO, YOUR PROJECT IS UNACCEPTABLE.

D. Class observation: Use the information on the handout and take good notes. You will use these notes and the notes from the interview and class discussion to give an oral presentation.TAKE PICTURES OF THE INSTRUCTOR AND THE STUDENTS.

GOOD LUCK.

HANDOUT D

ESLN 025-101, Advanced Conversation I
Fall 1996

NAME: _____

CLASS OBSERVATION

The following areas are to help you take notes as you observe the class. Later, you will use these notes for an oral report.

I. Name of instructor? Division?
Name of class, section, date, time, location?
Required or elective?

II. Observation of instructor?

III. Observation of students?

IV. Style of teaching by instructor?

V. Student activities in class?
Take notes, participate in discussion and groups, listen to instructor lecture, give oral reports, go over homework, etc.?
Problem solving?
OTHERS?

VI. Informal/formal atmosphere
Why? Why not?

Clothing (instructor/students)
Respect for instructor?
Students address instructor properly?
Class punctuality?
Absences?
Students/instructor comfortable with each other?

VII. Four items you learned about this course the day of your visit

VIII. Positive/comments about this class to other classmates/friends or negative

IX. Would you take this class? Why? Why not?

X. Compare and contrast: Delgado and a class you took in the highest level in your native country.

NOTE: Other areas to include: tests, grades, discipline, classroom facilities

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HANDOUT E

Delgado COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CITY PARK CAMPUS
615 City Park Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119-4399
(504) 483-4114
FAX (504) 483-4577

October 23, 1996

TO:

FROM: Yadira Diaz
Instructor
English as a Second Language

SUBJECT: Class Visit by ESL Students

I would like to request your permission for one or several students to visit your class as a part of a project in my ESL conversation class. The purposes of this project are several:

1. to observe classroom procedures and behaviors in the U.S.
2. to check our ability to understand lectures given in English (a second language for us)
3. to explore academic areas of interest for a possible major
4. to take a group picture for a written report

I would appreciate the opportunity you give my students to learn more about the courses offered at Delgado and to assess their readiness for regular courses.

I thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Yadira M. Diaz

Yadira M. Diaz
Office 1-209W
Mailbox 1-212W
Office Tel. 4341

NOTE: Can you be available for a brief interview by my students?

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HANDOUT F

The following ideas are the ones that you brainstormed and divided into categories. Decide with your group, which ones belong to education in your native country and education in the U.S., (Delgado Community College).

1. Individualism	Group or society's beliefs
2. Uniforms	Non-uniforms
3. Lots of memorization	Some memorization
4. Mixed students	Same sex: all girls or all boys
5. Formal clothing for students	Informal clothing for students
6. Formal clothing for students	Informal clothing for teachers
7. Classes always held in the classroom	Classes sometimes held outside the classroom
8. Teacher lectures all the time; students listen and take notes. Very little class discussion	Teacher lectures very little; students sometimes take notes but they listen. A lot of class discussion
9. Many written tests where a student answers short questions and writes compositions	Many memorization tests where a student answers true and false questions or multiple choice questions (a, b, c, or d)
10. Little problem solving	A lot of problem solving
11. Compulsory age to attend school	No compulsory age to attend school
12. High respect for teacher	Some respect for teacher
13. Students call the teacher by the last name or the first name	Students call the teacher "Teacher"
14. Students get up when the teacher or a person walks in the classroom	Students don't get up when the teacher or a person walks in the classroom
15. Students don't get up when the teacher calls on them to answer questions.	Students get up when the teacher calls on them to answer questions

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NAME: _____
DATE: _____

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

order to prepare for your oral presentation and based on all the information you've gathered
en interviewing the instructor, visiting the class, and discussing education in class, complete
e following chart.

Native Country: _____	Delgado Community College

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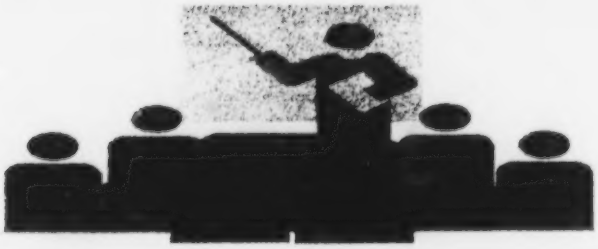
HANDOUT G



SPECIAL PROJECT ON EDUCATION (15% of grade)
ESLN 025-101, ADVANCED CONVERSATION
Due: Monday, November 11, 1996 (II a.m.)
No late projects will be accepted.

PLEASE FOLLOW DIRECTIONS. WE WILL HAVE CLASS TIME TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT.

1. *You will write a TYPED composition which will include the two major parts of your project:*
   a. *Interview with the Instructor*
   b. *Class Visit/Observation*
   c. *You will use your written notes and/or taped notes.*
2. *Follow the rules of writing a composition.*
   a. *Your composition should be organized to have introduction, body, and conclusion. Suggestion:*
      - *Introduction - Introduce your project-- why your interest in this instructor and the class*
      - *Body paragraph - Write about the interview.*
      - *Body paragraph -Write about the class visit/observation. This paragraph will probably be the longest.*
      - *Body paragraph - Explain t he major similarity or difference in this class to a high school, college or university class in your country.*
      - *Conclusion - What advice would you recommend to the instructor about the class? Why? (No personal comments, please.) Would you take this class or recommend it to a friend to take it? Why? Or Why not?*
   b. *After you complete the final paper, you will EDIT for grammar correctness. A COMPOSITION WHICH DOES NOT FOLLOW DIRECTIONS AND IS FULL OF GRAMMAR WEAKNESSES IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.*
3. *POSTER PRESENTATION - Your composition will go on a poster along with photos of the instructor and the class or magazine pictures which illustrate something about this particular class.*
4. *Be prepared to present orally to guests.*

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